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Human services impacted by potential budget cuts

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Communications

Child welfare programs and other vital services to children and vulnerable adults are likely to suffer if potential budget cuts become a reality, Cabinet for Families and Children Secretary Viola Miller said this week.

Speaking at Gov. Paul Patton's Dec. 17 press conference on the possible impact of funding shortfalls on human services, Miller said her agency has exhausted its options for belt-tightening in ways that avoid severe damage to core services.

"We do not have any frivolous programs," she said. "All of our work is focused on improving lives."

At the press conference, Gov. Patton, Miller and Cabinet for Health Services Secretary Marcia Morgan described the possible effects on human services of potential budget cuts of 2.6 percent in the current fiscal year and 5.2 percent in fiscal 2004.

Cuts of those amounts—which match projected revenue shortfalls—would cost CFC more than \$8 million this fiscal year and more than \$16 million next year. Miller said total funding loss would be more than double those sums because of the loss of federal matching funds.

A foster parent and other service providers followed Miller to the podium

to describe how funding cuts might force them to curtail or deny services to abused and neglected children, victims of domestic violence and elderly or mentally ill adults.

"We certainly would have to lower our standards or reduce the type care that we can give the children" if foster care reimbursement rates are lowered, said Shirley Hedges of Madisonville, a foster and adoptive parent.

Judith Lambeth, chief executive officer of the Maryhurst private child-caring agency in Louisville, described the painful progress of "Sarah," a child who came to Maryhurst after suffering severe physical and sexual abuse. A 5 percent budget cut next fiscal year would "absolutely prevent Maryhurst from providing the services that 'Sarah' so desperately needed," Lambeth said.

Leah Alcott, head of a domestic violence program in Bowling Green, warned that cuts to centers like hers could lead to a rise in abuse-related homicides. The head of another private child-caring agency and a personal care provider said funding-driven cuts in their services would lead to rising costs elsewhere in society.

"Statistics prove to us that, left untreated, children who are neglected and abused grow up to be homeless adults, imprisoned adults and, even worse, parents who abuse their own children," said Gordon Brown, director of Home of the Innocents in Louisville. Drew Haynes, who owns and operates several personal care facilities in western Kentucky, said cuts in supplementary funds for residents of facilities like his "could put as many as a thousand mentally ill residents on our streets."

Over the past two years, the state general fund dollars flowing to the Cabinet have been reduced 12.4 percent. Miller said the Cabinet has adapted by,

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among other things, cutting more than \$6 million from direct service contracts and \$5 million from information system services.

Foster care and adoption subsidies and payments to private child-caring providers have been held flat, and rate reductions possible in a new round of budget cuts “will erode this vital infrastructure of care” for abused and neglected children in the Cabinet’s custody, she said.

Gov. Patton said that cuts in some areas of government might take years or decades to impact the quality of life, but that cuts in human services “would cause serious and immediate harm to hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians.”

Holiday stress is real; but is increased suicides during the season fact or myth?

CHS Communications

Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s all come within a few weeks of each other, promising some very busy days of joy, friendship and good times. Right?

But, what about the ever-present notion that holiday stress is so strong that the suicide rate in the U.S. increases during December?

Wrong, according to statistics gathered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This research, based on data collected during 1989-91, shows that suicides actually peak during June and July, with December having the lowest rate of 75 suicides per 100,000 people.

However, the debate remains as to whether the stress of the holidays increases the level of depression. There is no data that indicates any increase in the number of people seeking mental health services during the holidays. Nevertheless, it is easy to see how many of us do experience increased stress during this time.

We stretch ourselves by committing to do more things than possible. Our activities increase, while our sleep time decreases. People are more prone to increasing alcohol and sugar intake. We often find ourselves trying to cope with family disputes and age-old feuds. Sometimes we are unable to join our family and friends, or have too many guests crammed into our space. Many people are concerned with *end-of-the-year* business needs or *end-of-the-semester* deadlines. In addition, we are faced with the potential failure of not meeting the expectations for blessed and peaceful days from our loved ones such as not choosing the perfect present.

Here are some suggestions on how to keep your holiday season less stressful and more enjoyable for you, your family and friends from the Cabinet for Health Services’ Mental Health staff.

- Keep yourself centered in the present with realistic expectations. Don’t get stuck worrying about repeating a negative holiday or set yourself up by anticipating the *perfect* day.
- Try to avoid overextending commitments that drain you past the point of being helpful.
- Remember to keep a healthy focus by:
 - eating well,
 - getting adequate sleep.
 - keeping up with regular medications,
 - exercising, and
 - limiting amount of alcohol consumption.
 - Practice relaxation techniques.
- Try something new this holiday.
- Do something for someone else.
- Make sure and remember the things for which you are thankful.
- Avoid using the holidays as a time to play peacemaker and try to resolve family problems.

If you do experience the holiday blues, you may want to consider the reason. Sometimes the cause can be found in the demands of the season and the increased stresses that may accompany those demands. In that instance, the

suggestions above are probably a good start in managing your feelings.

If the cause of your depressed mood is a result of past losses that are more keenly felt during the holidays, consider taking advantage of the situation. Don’t avoid the feelings of loss. It is expected that during the season of *peace and goodwill* expectations may be unrealistic and wishes for how things used to be may take over. Often this means feeling as though you will be unable to enjoy the present holiday without that missing part. Think about it. Talk about it. Write About it and then begin to realize that you do not have to forget in order to move past the loss. However, you can begin to experience the holiday in the present tense. As you accept the past loss, the intensity of the negative feelings will lessen. Find someone who will listen to you express some of these thoughts aloud. It is also possible that you may also be helped by some professional guidance in this mourning process.

Whatever the reason for the holiday blues, if you or someone you know cannot seem to cope, do not hesitate to seek help. Reach out and connect with another person, whether friend, family, mental health professional or crisis line. Information is also available at your local community mental health center.

Comprehensive Care Crisis Line for Anderson, Bourbon, Boyle, Clark, Estill, Fayette, Franklin, Garrard, Harrison, Jessamine, Lincoln, Madison, Mercer, Nicholas, Powell and Scott counties - BLUEGRASS REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH/MENTAL RETARDATION BOARD INC. (859) 253-1686

Government offices observe holiday closings



State offices will be closed on Dec. 24 and 25, as well as Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 for the holidays.